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TAGS: SMIG SCUL CVIS PGOV CU SP  
SUBJECT: 150,000 CUBANS TO OBTAIN SPANISH CITIZENSHIP UNDER  
NEW LAW

Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) About 150,000 Cubans will acquire Spanish citizenship in the next three years under the recently-implemented "Law of Historical Memory", according to Spain's senior consular official in Cuba. Consul General Pablo Barrios told USINT CG last week that the law, which took effect December 29, will grant Spanish citizenship to 50,000 Cubans in each of the two years during which it is in effect. He said that he fully expects it will be necessary to extend the application period for the additional year contemplated in the law in order to address demand, with another 50,000 Cubans receiving citizenship during the third year.

¶2. (U) Spain's Law of Historical Memory grants citizenship to anyone whose father or mother were Spanish citizens and to grandchildren of those who lost or were forced to renounce their Spanish citizenship as a consequence of exile during the Spanish civil war and subsequent Francoist repression (as a result of this second disposition, the law is widely known in Cuba as "the law of the grandchildren"). Children 18 and under of persons who qualify for citizenship under this program will likewise be granted citizenship and are included in the estimate of total beneficiaries.

¶3. (U) Barrios said that only Argentina is expected to produce more new Spanish citizens through this program than Cuba. Tens of thousands of Cubans have lined up outside the Spanish Embassy in Havana to pick-up applications forms and informational materials about the program since December 29. Actual appointments to apply for citizenship must be made on the internet directly to the Spanish Consulate. Barrios commented that Cuban "inventiveness" has resulted in an avalanche of appointment requests, despite extremely low internet penetration in Cuba. In all, some 300,000 Cubans are expected to apply.

¶4. (U) Barrios disputed what is already the conventional wisdom in Cuba, namely, that most applying for Spanish citizenship actually want to facilitate an eventual entry to the United States. He said the average age of successful applicants will be between 40 and 50 and most will be reluctant to start their lives over from scratch in either Spain or the United States. He felt most applicants simply want to facilitate temporary travel or are under the impression - mistaken in the vast majority of cases - that citizenship will entitle them to some form of financial assistance from the Spanish government.

¶5. (C) Barrios said that he received a "correct, but cool" reception when he personally briefed Carlos Zamora, the Cuban Foreign Ministry's Director General for Consular Affairs, on the program. According to Barrios, Zamora's only substantive reaction was to remind him that Cuba does not recognize dual citizenship and to make clear that any Cuban who acquires Spanish citizenship under this law will remain subject to

Cuban entry and exit requirements. Barrios commented that he concludes from this that, for example, newly-minted Spanish citizens will still need an invitation letter from someone in Spain, duly notarized by the Cuban Consulate in Madrid, in order to visit Spain.

¶6. (C) COMMENT. A significant, if unquantifiable, percentage of those applying for Spanish citizenship under the Law of Historical Memory clearly intend to emigrate from Cuba, or at a minimum, to facilitate their children's emigration.

Equally clearly, some hope to end up in the United States; in the past three weeks, USINT has received numerous inquiries about the Visa Waiver Program from persons identifying themselves as applicants for Spanish citizenship. The Cuban government is extremely sensitive about any public manifestation of a desire to leave the island, and the local media has been silent about the Spanish program. One effect of the law will be to highlight the burdensomeness of Cuba's entry and exit requirements for its citizens. For example, it is entirely possible that many of those acquiring Spanish citizenship will not have anyone in Spain - or anywhere else outside of Cuba - qualified to invite them to visit, which is a requirement under Cuban law in order to obtain an exit permit. The absurdity of this situation could generate additional pressure for reform in Cuban travel regulations.

END COMMENT.

FARRAR